'It's sad in indescribable ways': Artists supporting Palestine lose work, receive backlash online for expressing solidarity

From online harassment and censorship to cancelled gigs, artists including LCY, Zeynep and Maher Daniel have been penalised in myriad ways.

Artists expressing solidarity for Palestine (AKA Occupied Palestinian Territories) are losing work and receiving backlash online.

The events of the last month—which have seen the Israeli army decimate Gaza and kill 10,000-plus people in response to the October 7th attacks by Palestinian militant group Hamas—have reverberated across the world. Artists supporting Palestine have been penalised in myriad ways for showing solidarity, whether through online hate, censorship or cancelled gigs.

Barcelona-based Palestinian producer Maher Daniel is one of them. Speaking to *Resident Advisor*, he said one of his Instagram Stories condemning Hamas and the Israeli occupation of Palestine triggered a spate of responses calling him a "terrorism supporter." He said it's unfair to call out Hamas "atrocities" but not those committed "daily" against Palestinians by "Zionist settlers." The October 7th attacks, he added, were a direct response to human rights violations, land grabs, systemic violence, displacement and illegal settlements imposed on Palestinians.

Daniel followed up with a second video, reiterating his condemnation for both Islamophobia and antisemitism. While feedback was "mostly positive," he still received angry responses from people saying "there's no occupation or apartheid." But he "doesn't care" if people stop booking him over his opinions. "Anyone in the music industry affected by what's going on needs to speak up and shouldn't be concerned about this impacting careers," he added. "If it does, then it just shows the kind of people you're working with."

In Germany, where the authorities have been cracking down on pro-Palestinian protests, artists like Nicolás Jaar have been deplatformed for their views. Others have felt compelled to cancel gigs because of the response from certain clubs or venues. On October 27th, German-born Syrian DJ Zeynep pulled her residency at Leipzig club Neue Welle after it refused to promote her event because of her Instagram posts "about the ongoing bombardment of Palestinians where I am advocating for basic human rights," she wrote in a statement. The venue, she added, had contradicted its no-discrimination code of conduct, and she could no longer identify with it.

Zeynep was scheduled to perform on November 24th alongside OK Williams and Riva, who have both also agreed to cancel the gig. A spokesperson for Neue Welle confirmed the venue had "delayed promotion" of Zeynep's event to query her "social media activities," after which the artist allegedly "refused any further dialogue with our team"–adding, there was "no cancellation from our side." But Zeynep refutes this, saying she "wasn't given the chance to open dialogue with Neue Welle from the beginning" and that the club "deliberately" continued to promote other events over her residency.

In a public statement, Neue Welle made no reference to Zeynep or her post, sharing instead a list of "non-negotiable" prerequisites to discussing views on Palestine and

Israel, including "no questioning of Israel's right to exist" and "no ignoring of the ongoing suffering of the Palestinian people."

That same weekend, a spat between Munich club BLITZ and London-based artist LCY also led to a cancellation. According to LCY, who posted a statement via Instagram Stories on October 27th, they were about to board their flight when they heard that BLITZ didn't want them to play "because of my posts about Palestine." They added that, while it was "shitty" to lose work, they would be "screaming 'free Palestine'" at the next London protest, which took place on October 30th. (BLITZ said everyone involved was paid in full.)

BLITZ later released a statement saying it cancelled the event because "an artist shared a video recommending Israel should be dissolved–that it shouldn't exist." When *RA* spoke with the venue, a representative said LCY's post had led to staff members receiving threats. They also condemned the German state for banning Palestinian protests, calling it "a scandal and a real shame for our democracy." But Sarra Wild, the artist in the video shared by LCY, told *RA* that she was "misquoted" out of context. In the video (which appears on slide five), she said, "Israel must be dissolved and go back to being called Palestine—a home for Muslims, Jews, Christians."

The dispute led to BLITZ issuing an apology via Instagram Stories for misquoting Wild and citing "only an excerpt from what was said in the video." The club also removed its original post. The statement continued: "We understand now that quoting without giving the full context wasn't right [...] We'd like to apologise for that, and we're sorry for any harm caused." The statement also condemned the "current war" and demanded an "immediate ceasefire to stop the killing of innocent lives [...] We still profoundly disagree with the idea of dissolving the state of Israel as the only possible chance for co-existence."

Another German venue has also apologised after threatening to cancel a gig by the Angolan producer Nazar and conflating his pro-Palestinian posts with sympathies for Hamas. Nazar, who requested the name and location of the venue not be disclosed, told *RA* that his scathing response triggered a venue spokesperson to backtrack and tell him "we don't blame you for any pro-Palestinian and or anti-colonialism comments." Nazar said it was important to post about this scenario as fear of losing work has stopped many artists from showing solidarity with Palestine since October 7th. "I want to encourage others not to back down and to call out the hypocrisy," he added.

In a recent statement, the Berlin Culture Workers for Palestine asked cultural institutions to take a stance against "racism and colonialism"–and warned that following state policies censoring artists for their solidarity with Palestine sets "a frightening precedent."

But censorship of Palestinian solidarity isn't a new thing. Hebh Jamal, a Palestinian journalist based in Germany, reported that Berlin is becoming a "police state" when it comes to protests about Israeli atrocities in Palestine. In June, riot police clamped down on a protest of Jewish Berliners—among them was art professor Adam Broomberg, who was beaten and arrested. Just last month, police banned a Peace in the Middle East protest, claiming it posed immediate danger of "seditious, antisemitic exclamations." Bans on pro-Palestinian protests have also recently been reported in Austria, Hungary and Switzerland.

"There's a sense of helplessness among Palestinian musicians witnessing the stifling of Palestinian voices in the face of Gaza's current decimation," Palestinian music researcher and cofounder of Exist Festival, Bint Mbareh, told *RA*. She said two of her friends have already been imprisoned in Berlin for "voicing anti-genocidal sentiments."

As a result, some promoters have felt compelled to cancel events. This includes the award-winning AL.Berlin, which features artists from Europe and the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region. Event co-producer Muhammad Jabali cofounded the event with "Palestinians, Lebanese and Jews for a free Palestine." He told *RA* that in a climate of "draconian restrictions on expressions of Palestinian solidarity, none of us here in Berlin had the mental and emotional power to continue–so producing the event in this kind of atmosphere just became practically impossible." He said it was also "impossible" to produce an event featuring "free Palestine" content in the same spirit and confidence as in previous editions.

"It's sad in indescribable ways," he said. "We thought we were gaining ground for our community in the Berlin live music and clubbing scene. But we feel we've lost everything we stand for as we see our fellow artists being erased from the Berlin cultural landscape in a wave of pro-Israeli support."

He added: "Obviously many of the AL.Berlin team members are affected by this war, not to mention the obvious loss many of our close core community is experiencing at the moment."

Jabali said there had been plans for Palestinian station Radio Alhara to host a stage but this "wasn't even announced because the events [in Palestine] escalated." Some artists, he said, were unable to travel from Palestine without knowing their families would be safe and they could return home. This was also the case for artists scheduled to perform at Turin's C2C Festival last weekend. Writing via Instagram, the organisers said they wouldn't be replacing BLTNM's Shabjdeed, Al Nather, Daboor and Mouri out of solidarity and "to let their absence resonate in these intense days."

For more on how the electronic music community is responding to the crisis in Palestine, read our rolling resources story.

Photo credit: Ash Hayes